

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-14

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NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 IO-14 DRC-01 /105 W

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3006

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CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN GETS UNDER WAY

REF: CANBERRA 2179

1. SUMMARY: ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN BEGAN UNOFFICIALLY APR 16 WITH 10-MINUTE RADIO AND TV SPEECH TO NATION BY PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM. PRIME MINISTER REVIEWED ACTIONS OF GOVERNMENT, ATTACKED OPPOSITION AS QTE COALITION OF HATE END QTE, AND ASKED PEOPLE FOR VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN WILL REPLY TO WHITLAM APR 23. LIBERALS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH COUNTRY PARTY, WORKING OUT DETAILED PROGRAM FOR ELECTIONS. ALL PARTIES FINALIZING ELECTION SLATES, WITH NOMINATIONS TO CLOSE APR 29. POLL TAKEN IN EARLY APRIL SHOWED ALP AND LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES VERY CLOSELY BUNCHED, THOUGH IT CONCLUDED OPPOSITION MIGHT HAVE WON NARROWLY IF DLP SUPPORT CONTINUED FOR LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

2. AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN BEGAN AT LEAST UNOFFICIALLY ON APR 16 WITH TEN-MINUTE RADIO AND TV ADDRESS TO NATION BY
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PRIME MINSTER WHITLAM. ALTHOUGH PURPOSE OF SPEECH

WAS STATED TO BE TO EXPLAIN WHY HE HAD ASKED GOVERNOR GENERAL FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT, IN FACT WHITLAM PREDICTABLY POINTED WITH PRIDE AT ACHIEVEMENTS OF HIS GOVERNMENT SINCE DEC, 1972, VIEWED WITH ALARM ACTIONS BY OPPOSITION PARTIES, WHICH HE TERMED QTE COALITION OF HATE END QTE AND ASKED AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE FOR SUPPORT, HELP, AND COOPERATION IN LEADING NATION TOWARDS FUTURE. HE CONCLUDED QTE DO NOT TURN BACK; DO NOT TURN YOUR BACK UPON THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA END QTE. WHITLAM WAS SUBDUED IN MANNER AND HAS CUT HIS HAIR SHORTER THAN RECENTLY, PERHAPS REFLECTING THE ATTENTION TO DETAIL AND IMAGE ON WHICH ALP AND ITS ADVERTISING CONSULTANTS HAVE BEEN CONCENTRATING.

3. LIBERAL OPPOSITION HAS BEEN ENGAGED SINCE APR 14 IN VIRTUALLY NON-STOP MEETINGS IN MELBOURNE DESIGNED TO COMPLETE PARTY PROGRAM WHICH WILL BE PUT TO ELECTORATE. COUNTRY PARTY REPS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN SOME OF MEETINGS, BUT THERE ARE SIGNS OF CONTINUING DISARRAY AMONG OPPOSITION PARTIES WHICH GENERALLY PRO-LABOR JOURNALISTS HAVE REPORTED IN DETAIL. SNEDDEN WILL REPLY FORMALLY TO PRIME MINISTER ON RADIO AND TV APR 23, PERHAPS WITH VERSION OF PROGRAM NOW BEING WORKED OUT IN DETAIL. DLP APPEARS TO BE ON VERGE OF DECISION NOT TO CONTEST HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ELECTION BUT TO CONCENTRATE ON SENATE ELECTIONS, WHERE PARTY HAS FIVE SEATS, TWO OF WHICH IT IS LIKELY TO LOSE. ODDLY ENOUGH, DOUBLE DISSOLUTION HAS PROBABLY SAVED ONE DLP SENATE SEAT (IN QUEENSLAND), AND THE UNPREDICTABLE OPERATION OF THE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AND PREFERENCE SYSTEM IN THE SENATE MIGHT SAVE AT LEAST ONE OF THE REMAINING TWO DLP SEATS, PERHAPS LEAVING THE PARTY STILL IN COMMAND OF THE VOTING BALANCE IN THE SENATE. CONSEQUENCE OF DLP DECISION NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ELECTION NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR. NUMBER OF LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTY FIGURES HAVE COMMENTED PRIVATELY THAT DLP VOTERS WILL HAVE NO OPTION BUT TO VOTE FOR LIBERAL OR COUNTRY PARTY CANDIDATES IF NO DLP CANDIDATES PRESENTED IN HOUSE. ALP OBSERVERS, ODDLY ENOUGH, HAVE TENDED TO CONFIRM THIS VIEW, COMMENTING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT THERE IS NO LONGER ANY QTE LABOR END QTE CONTENT IN DLP, WHICH IS NOW ONLY A VERSION OF LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES. PARLIAMENTARY LEADER OF DLP, SENATOR MCMANUS, HAS UNSUCCESSFULLY SOUGHT AGREEMENT FROM LIBERALS TO PRESENT JOINT SENATE TICKET, IN MANEUVER ESSENTIALLY AIMED AT PRESERVING DLP POSITION. LIBERALS IN VICTORIA AND NEW SOUTH WALES HAVE REFUSED TO AGREE WITH JOINT TICKET, THOUGH MATTER STILL UNDER

CONSIDERATION IN QUEENSLAND.

4. ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN WILL FORMALLY BEGIN APRIL 29 WITH POLICY SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER, FOLLOWED ON APRIL 30 BY LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN, WITH COUNTRY PARTY AND DLP SPEECHES FOLLOWING LATER. POLITICAL ACTIVITY AT PRESENT IS LARGELY CONCENTRATED ON IRONING OUT SENATE SLATES WITHIN THE RESPECTIVE PARTIES. NOMINATIONS CLOSE APRIL 29.

4. AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, IN SURVEY RELEASED APR 13, STATED THAT SAMPLE TAKEN IN EARLY APRIL SHOWED PARTIES VERY EVENLY BALANCED, WITH LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTY HAVING 47 PERCENT, DLP 3 PERCENT, ALP 45 PERCENT, AND AUSTRALIAN

PARTY 5 PERCENT. POLL CONCLUDED THAT LIBERAL-COUNTRY COALITION MIGHT HAVE WON ELECTION NARROWLY, IF DLP CONTESTED AS MANY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SEATS AS IN PAST AND IF ITS PREFERENCES WENT AS TIGHTLY AS IN PAST TO LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES.
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